

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

Oral Statement of
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Before The ***Committee On Resources***
U.S. House Of Representatives
Regarding **H.R.856**
"THE UNITED STATES--PUERTO RICO POLITICAL STATUS ACT"

April 21, 1997
Mayaguez, Puerto Rico

Chairman Young, members of this Committee, I am proud to welcome you to the city of Mayaguez.

During all these years, we have visited Washington many times to tell you about the tangled web of local party status politics, and to explain how failure to solve the status issue has crippled the social and economic development of Puerto Rico. It has been frustrating, because those who want to preserve their political power and profit by preserving the status quo, have had tremendous ability to influence Congress.

Today I am filled with that sense of peace that comes in the struggle for liberty, when the truth is finally revealed. I know the behavior of some in the audience at the hearing in San Juan was not as dignified as it should have been, but the Committee did the right thing by allowing a pro-commonwealth faction to show their true colors.

That political faction in Puerto Rico went beyond cheering for their champions and showed disrespect for witnesses and the process. However, it was not spontaneous. It was a well orchestrated event meant to disrupt the hearings and reduce the time allotted for questions and other witnesses.

The San Juan Star said in yesterday's edition " When the panel of pro-commonwealth witnesses completed its turn before the panel, dozens of the PDP faithful left. And that brought almost to an end the noise and disruption."

That is why self determination should not be a transaction between Congress and the P. R. political parties. People have consistently voted for a status change in all referendums and against the status quo. The status quo does not have the support of the majority of the people of Puerto Rico. That is why it is imperative that a process for self determination be established. At the end, it will be an individual choice of a US citizen in Puerto Rico, who will exercise the right to self determination in the privacy of a voting booth.

At the San Juan hearing, you heard the bizarre theories of sovereignty and tortured logic of the autonomy doctrine. It is a passive aggressive dogma, that in a militant tone demands recognition of a separate national sovereignty, but claims victimization at the mere suggestion that separate nationality might mean separate citizenship. It is a schizophrenic political identity, which enables the aristocracy of the colonial era to perpetuate its political power, by pretending that such aristocracy is the champion of Puerto Rican dignity.

The discussion of status under the Young bill has unfolded the truth about the proposals of commonwealth exponents.

Don't take it from me, you heard it yourself.

Their theory is that since all people have inherent sovereignty and this is recognized by the United Nations resolutions and the U.S. Constitution, then Puerto Rico has a form of separate sovereignty.

They take that half-truth and pretend, that the local sovereignty and internal autonomy that Puerto Rico has under the territorial constitution, approved in 1952, is the same as national sovereignty for Puerto Rico.

This makes a mockery of U.S national sovereignty under the treaty of Paris and the territorial clause.

Again they have revealed their false theory to Congress; asserting that local autonomy granted by Congress is a form of national sovereignty that puts Puerto Rico on a plane of bilateral, sovereign-to-sovereign, nation-to-nation level of "mutuality" with the US.

But when they say "mutual consent" they mean that the political relationship of Puerto Rico and the United States is permanent because Congress agreed to a local Constitution in 1952.

According to them, through this, Congress gave up its sovereign power, and consented to make non-incorporation a permanent union and binding status for Puerto Rico, with United States citizenship.

Their theory ignores constitutional supremacy. No matter what PL 600 purported to do, the Constitution's Supremacy Clause prevails.

They also told you that Congress has the power to improve, enhance, develop Puerto Rico but no authority to require Puerto Rico to contribute to the Union. That arrogant demand is what some now are calling "reverse colonialism". According to these political leaders, the United States has national sovereignty only to the extent delegated by the nation of Puerto Rico.

But listen to this, even though the 10th amendment does not apply to Puerto Rico, if Congress exercises its constitutional authority under the territorial clause, they make the childish threat to take you to court.

You also saw the politics of shouting down all who question their opportunistic ideology, imposed on us by the strident, shrill and uncivil pro-commonwealth representatives.

I want to leave you with one thought:

My message is simple. Although the United States Federal government contributed to the problem by going along with the myth, and allowing the colonial situation to be perpetuated, the United States did not do this to Puerto Rico;

The leadership of the pro-commonwealth party was the driving force in creating this problem, because they do not have the courage to face the real choice between citizenship under United States national sovereignty and separate national sovereignty with separate citizenship.

The real challenge for the people in self-determination, is to take the responsibility for solving our own problem. Commonwealthers have tried for forty years to propose a status which does not exist. Now we

need to face the real choices. All we need is for Congress set aside the myth and point out the honest realities.

Please define the options available, and we can do the rest ourselves. The people of Puerto Rico have great faith, that this particular effort will put an end to our divisive status discussion and uncertainty about our future.

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